



Lesson 2 – Minibridge

Defence

- Defence often requires you to take far less tricks than Declarer has contracted in order to beat the contract
- If declarer contracts to make game then all the defenders need to do is take 5 tricks before declarer can take his 9
- However, the defence will usually have fewer HCP than declarer and must therefore use them sparingly and not simply cash aces:

♦ - 976
♦ - AT8 ♦ - QJ42
♦ - K53

If West simply cash the ♦A, it will give declarer the ♦K for free.

If instead East can get on lead and play a diamond, declarer will get no diamond tricks

- Remember that we are working with partner to try and beat the contract so we need to try and communicate information about our hand across the table using the cards that we play
- This will help us to build a picture of the hand and then enable us to beat it
- Sometimes we cannot beat the contract, but we can reduce declarer's score by preventing them from making overtricks

- The first thing to do is make the correct opening lead once Dummy has gone down and declarer has stated their contract
- Usually we will want to lead our best suit in order to try and set up tricks for our side in the long run

Consider this hand:

♠ - KQJT6
 ♥ - A953
 ♦ - 6
 ♣ - J52

If we think about the spade suit using PLP, we have 3 slow tricks by power and possibly a 4th by length all we need to do is knock out the ♠A.

Suppose declarer has contracted for Game (9 tricks):

- We should lead the ♠K and continue until the ♠A has gone
- When declarer then plays on hearts we can win the ♥A and cash our remaining spade winners
- If we have a trick by length as well as 3 by power that will give us 4 spade tricks and 1 heart trick and we will have beaten the contract!

This give us our 1st rule when on lead as defender:

Lead top of a sequence

We lead the top of a sequence when we have at least 1 honour (A/K/Q/J) and at least two cards directly below it e.g.

KQJ42	LEAD K
QJT7	LEAD Q
JT92	LEAD J

Already we have started to paint a picture of our hand for partner, when we lead an honour we will always have the one directly below it and should have the next one too (see later).

Consider a different hand:

♠ - 6543

♥ - A953

♦ - 62

♣ - T52

We do not have a great hand, our only real asset is the hA, but simply cashing would not help our side as declarer would play small cards to the trick (see earlier)

What we want to do is use the ♥A to capture an honour.

From these sorts of holdings we should lead our 4th HIGHEST³, this will show partner that we have an honour in the suit led and that we think this is the suit we have our best chance at beating the contract.

This gives us the 2nd rule

Lead 4th highest from an honour

So from the hand above we would lead the ♥3

The Ten is NOT an honour

See below for what you would lead

³ If we wanted to lead a suit of only 3 cards with an honour we would lead third highest e.g. the 6 from A86.

Sometimes our hand may have no honours at all:

♠ - 9843
♥ - 953
♦ - 632
♣ - 752

We have no sequence and no honour, but we must still find a lead.

Whilst no suit is particularly attractive we probably want to lead our longest suit (here spades) to try and set up tricks by length. Sometimes looking at dummy can help:

♠ - 9843
♥ - 953
♦ - 632
♣ - 752

♠ - KQJ
♥ - 86
♦ - Q974
♣ - AJ64

If West is on lead and can see dummy with the example hand – what should they lead?

Although their longest suit is spades, Dummy has at least 2 stops whilst there is a gap in the heart suit

From holdings without an honour such as this we should lead our 2nd HIGHEST

This gives us our 3rd rule:

Lead 2nd highest from suits without an honour including the Ten

So from this hand we would lead the ♥5

Some other less common holdings may be something like:

1 – KJT62

2 – QT973

From these sorts of holdings, we would lead the top of an interior sequence:

From 1) we should lead the J and from 2) the Ten

Other times, we may have two honours without the third, which is not strictly a sequence:

1 – AK75

2 – KQ32

3 – QJ83

From 1) it is usually ok to lead the Ace, but from 2) and 3) a small one is usually best

Having dealt with what partner should do as the first hand to lead, let's look at what 3rd hand should do

In general:

3rd hand plays high⁴

⁴ Or more fully – the highest that it can afford i.e. lowest from equal rank

What does this mean? Let's look at an example in the context of a full hand that also incorporates the declarer play themes that we looked at last time:

	♠ - KQ8	
	♥ - 86	
	♦ - Q974	
	♣ - AJ64	
♠ - J543		♠ - 96
♥ - J943		♥ - KQ52
♦ - 62		♦ - AT8
♣ - T52		♣ - Q873
	♠ - AT72	
	♥ - AT7	
	♦ - KJ53	
	♣ - K9	

Declarer (South) chooses to go for game (9 tricks) as they have:

Spades

Power: 3 quick

Length: 1 possibly if the ♠J comes down in two rounds or spades are 3-3

Hearts

Power: 1

Diamonds

Power: 2 slow (must knock out the Ace)

Length: 1 if the diamonds are 3-2 (68% of the time)

Clubs

Power: 2 quick

Position: 1 possibly, we can take the club finesse: cash ♣K (HONOURS FROM THE SHORT HAND FIRST) and play low to ♣J.

- West leads the ♥3 – 4th highest from an honour
- What should East play when declarer plays the ♥6 from dummy?

The ♥Q – 3rd hand plays the highest it can afford

Why not play the ♥K instead? If we can play one of two cards, why not use the cheapest we can afford, this will help partner to work out where the honours are:

So if partner plays the Queen and declarer wins the Ace (and can be believed) then partner will probably have the King. But if partner played the King, they have denied holding the Queen

- Declarer plays the Ace and plays a diamond to the Q and A try to set up 3 diamond tricks (Slow power)
- East then plays 3 more hearts and exits safely with a low diamond
- Declarer wins, what should they do next?
- If declarer takes the club finesse and it loses, they will go down even if they have 4 spade tricks as the defence will have 3H, 1C and 1D
- So before taking the club finesse declarer should cash the top 3 spades to see if they break 3-3 or the jack appears
- No such luck so declarer cashes ♣K and takes the club finesse – Unlucky!
- What would've happened if East had played low at trick 1?
- Declarer could have won the trick with the ♥T
- When declarer then plays on diamonds, East wins but cannot cash hearts as declarer still has the ♥A

Declarer now has:

Spades – same

Hearts – now 2 tricks not 1

Diamonds – same

Clubs – same

BUT – declarer has a second heart trick so they do not need to take the club finesse they can simply cash 3 spades, 3 diamonds and 2 clubs to go with the 2 hearts to make their contract with an overtrick!

Another important position to consider the defence from is when you are second to play to a trick, in general:

Second hand plays low

Let's see why by looking at a suit in isolation:

♦ - Q97
♦ - J642 ♦ - AT8
♦ - K53

Imagine that the lead is in Dummy (North)
When declarer calls for the ♦7 East (2nd hand) must play low

- When East plays low, declarer wins the King in their hand
- However when diamonds are next played on, East can capture Dummy's Queen with their Ace
- This will then promote their partner's Jack
- Declarer will only make 1 diamond trick

What happens if East plays the ♦A instead?

- Declarer will play small and when they regain the lead, both the ♦K and ♦Q will win tricks
- Declarer will now make 2 diamond tricks
- Note how this is the same as we saw at the beginning of the lesson, where if we just cashed an unsupported Ace it would capture thin air not an honour!

Playing with Trumps

Remember this hand from last lesson:

♠ - 4
♥ - 9642
♦ - AQ63
♣ - AT75

♠ - T6
♥ - AKQJT
♦ - K82
♣ - KQ4

- We discussed that declarer should only play in Part-score as the defenders could cash 5 spade tricks before we could cash our 9
- In Minibridge (and indeed Bridge), the declaring side is able to nominate a TRUMP SUIT
- This suit is usually the suit that the partnership has the most cards in and is usually at least an 8-card fit
- When declarer nominates the suit as trumps, the suit becomes more “powerful” than the remaining 3 suits such that:
 - If we are unable to follow suit, we can play a trump, this will beat the side suit card
 - If a trump is played to a trick, the highest trump played wins the trick
- So with the hand above, we nominate hearts as trumps as the defence will only be able to cash 1 spade trick, we can then trump (or ruff) the second spade
- Following this, we can then draw all the defenders trumps and then cash our side suit (non-trump suit) winners
- In fact, we would only lose 1 spade trick and make the rest – we can make a small slam with hearts as trumps but only a part-score in NT.

Trumps do not score the same NT

Scoring with Trumps

- The 4 suits are divided into two groups Majors (♠ and ♥) and Minors (♦ and ♣)
- As the name suggests, tricks made a the major suit nominated as trumps score more than those with a minor suit nominated

<u>Strain</u>	<u>Tricks 1-6</u>	<u>Trick 7</u>	<u>Tricks 8 to 13</u>
No Trumps	0	+40	+30 per trick
Major		+30	
Minor		+20 per trick	

- This means that the minimum number of tricks require to make game is different

To get a minimum of 100 points:

Game in a major: 4x30, so declarer must take 4 tricks above the book

Game in a minor: 5x20, so declarer must take 5 tricks above the book

Game in a Major: 10 tricks, scores +420

Game in a Minor: 11 tricks, scores +400

- As a result the average number of points needed between the two hands increases slightly as more tricks are needed

Game in a Major: 25/26 points

Game in a Minor: 27/28 points

Remember this is only a guide!

- Undertricks still score the same result
- However, just because you have an 8-card (or better) fit, does not necessarily mean that want want to nominate that suit as trumps
- It is often a better idea to play in game in NT (No Trumps) rather than game in a Minor (♦ or ♣) as game in NT requires 2 fewer tricks which is easier to achieve; plus game in NT will score better if you make 11 tricks (460 in NT vs 400 in a Minor)

Planning the Play – Trumps

- The main reason in electing a trump suit is due to the absence of high cards in a particular suit
- We want to be able to use our trumps to ruff the opponents winners such that we can get in and cash our tricks to make our contract
- However, the issue with playing in trumps is that if an opponent runs out of cards in a side suit and also posses some trumps they can ruff our winners, therefore:

It is nearly always correct to draw trumps before playing other suits

Look at the full example from above:

	♠ - 4	
	♥ - 9642	
	♦ - AQ63	
	♣ - AT75	
♠ - KQJ75		♠ - A9832
♥ - 875		♥ - 3
♦ - 94		♦ - JT75
♣ - J82		♣ - 963
	♠ - T6	
	♥ - AKQJT	
	♦ - K82	
	♣ - KQ4	

- Declarer chooses to go for game in hearts
- West leads the ♠K, and follows up with the ♠Q
- Dummy ruffs (plays a trump)
- Declarer now works out how many trumps the opponents have between them: 4
- Declarer then plays the ♥A, ♥K and ♥Q to draw the defenders' trumps and then plays their remaining winners in the other suits (REMEMBER HONOURS FROM THE SHORT HAND FIRST)

What would have happened if declarer had played the side suits before drawing trumps?

- When declarer wins the 2nd trick by ruffing in Dummy if they then cash two diamonds, these will be the cards left in each players hand:

	♠ - ♥ - 964 ♦ - Q6 ♣ - AT75	
♠ - J75 ♥ - 875 ♦ - ♣ - J82		♠ - A98 ♥ - 3 ♦ - JT ♣ - 963
	♠ - ♥ - AKQJT ♦ - 8 ♣ - KQ4	

- Now in Dummy (North) declarer calls for the ♦Q, East and South must follow suit, but West has no more diamonds left and can ruff this trick
- If however, Declarer had drawn the defender's trumps, this would not have happened

Sometimes, declarer should not draw all the trumps:

	♠ - K32	
	♥ - J	
	♦ - KQJ43	
	♣ - J862	
♠ - T98		♠ - 76
♥ - K9752		♥ - QT63
♦ - 97		♦ - AT5
♣ - T93		♣ - KQ54
	♠ - AQJ54	
	♥ - A84	
	♦ - 862	
	♣ - A7	

There is a combined 26 HCP so we should be thinking game, but which?

Would declarer want to play in NT?

- West will lead a heart (which one?)⁵ knocking out declarer's Ace
- When East then gains the lead with the ♦A the defence will cash 4 hearts

Would declarer want to play in spades?

Spades

Power: 4 quick

Length: 1 probably (unless spades are 5-0!)

Hearts

Power: 1

Diamonds

Power: 2 slow (must knock out the Ace)

Length: 2 possibly

Position: 1 possibly if West has the Ace

Clubs

Power: 1 quick

⁵ West should lead the ♥5

When playing in trumps, after counting winners, we count losers:

- Spades – none
- Hearts – two
- Diamonds – one
- Clubs – one

This is one too many!

How can we reduce our losers to only 3?

- Rather than rely on West having the ♦A we can make an extra trick by ruffing in the hand with shorter trumps, this would reduce our heart losers to only one
- But we also need to draw trumps to stop the defence ruffing our winners
- So when should we draw trumps?

Declarer should draw trumps if they do not have more losers than they can afford

- Here, we have more losers than we can afford, so we must ruff a heart and then draw trumps starting with the ♠K (HONOURS FROM THE SHORT HAND FIRST).
- We then need to set up two diamond tricks, after drawing trumps we play a small diamond to the King (LEAD TOWARDS HONOURS)
- When East wins the ♦A he can only cash one heart before South can ruff in and cash all the diamonds

Defence – Trumps

So what happens from a defensive point of view should declarer nominate a trump suit?

- Our lead agreements do not change, still 4th Highest, 2nd highest, top sequence – HOWEVER

Do not underlead Aces against trump contracts

- Another important influence is that, we may not want to set up a long suit to beat the contract instead we may want to get a defensive ruff

Consider this hand

♠ - 874
♥ - 4
♦ - 98763
♣ - J642

With a weak hand, defending against trumps it is often effective to lead our shortest suit, in this case a singleton: lead the ♥4 against a trump contract

If partner holds the Ace, they can win and return a heart for us to ruff.

♠ - 874
♥ - 74
♦ - 9863
♣ - J642

Again, we should lead our shortest suit (hearts), but which one?

Lead top of a doubleton

So with this hand against a trump contract we should lead the ♥7

The final lead we can make is one from 3 small cards if we don't want to open up a suit:

♠ - A742

♥ - K4

♦ - 986

♣ - A983

Against a trump contract we **SHOULD NOT UNDERLEAD ACES**, so we cannot lead either black suit, and leading a heart looks unappealing as it may give a free trick to declarer

So we have settled on leading a diamond, but which one?

From 3 small cards lead the Middle one, following up with the highest

So from this hand lead the ♦8

This is known as a MUD lead referring to the order in which the cards should be played:

Middle

Up (highest)

Down (lowest)

So here lead the ♦8, followed by the 9 and then 6, playing the suit in this way will let partner know that you have precisely 3

Practice your declarer play and defence

We have now covered all aspects of Minibridge

You should be able to tackle any aspect of the game on BlueChip Minibridge

Remember to keep practicing your card play and defence!